

Social Background

Neighbourhood Workers' Association, Toronto

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS FOR THE YEAR

THE past year has been one of very marked activity and of real progress in many lines of effort. The growing influence of the Neighbourhood Workers' Association has meant that it has been appealed to to carry forward many different types of work. The growth of the work at the Central Office has necessitated a removal to new offices and the appointment of a number of additional members of the staff. With the appointment of each new worker, however, the demands seemed to grow proportionately and there always appears to be more work clamouring for attention than it is possible for our office to handle. This process will not go on indefinitely but it is to be anticipated that for several years to come there will continue to be a rather rapid growth until the Association overtakes its problem and is able to adequately handle it.

To cope with the increase in work it has been decided to make several divisions, each with a Chief Secretary. The two main divisions for the present will be (1) The Family Work Division, which will include all problems relating to Social Case Work. Under this division will be also the Illegitimacy work to which has been assigned a worker, having specialized training along this line. It was felt that better results could be attained in this way than by having the Illegitimacy cases handled through the regular district channels. The results now being obtained justify this expectation. (2) The second general division will include Special Investigation, Christmas and Fresh Air Exchanges, District Organization and Educational Work.

The General Secretary would like to record his sincere appreciation to the members of the Staff for their loyal support throughout the year. They believe in the organization and have been working to achieve its purposes with great enthusiasm and ability.

FRESH AIR EXCHANGE.

Last summer a Fresh Air Exchange was opened at the Central Office to act as a Clearing House for Fresh Air Work, in order that duplications might be prevented and every child or mother should have a Fresh Air Outing where the need and right to such an outing was demonstrated.

A very important and valuable piece of work was done by the Exchange, so much so that there has not been the slightest question raised by any one as to the advisability of continuing this work. Through its operations, hundreds of children received an outing last summer, who otherwise would not have been cared for at all.

CHRISTMAS EXCHANGE.

Generosity is abroad at Christmas. There is a great need that this generosity should be directed into wise channels, and that the giving public should not be disheartened by hearing of families receiving an incredible number of Christmas Baskets, while others, equally deserving, received none at all. The Exchange aimed to prevent this and had a very gratifying measure of success. Its efficiency, of course, is conditioned by the number of organizations which use it and there are always those, who take up this work at Christmas, who are not engaged in social work during the year and thus do not know the procedure to follow. It is expected that the Christmas Exchange will be an increasingly helpful factor in the situation.

STAR SANTA CLAUS BOXES.

The Neighbourhood Workers' Association have co-operated with the *Star* in securing the lists of children eligible for *Star* Boxes. The N.W.A. District System was used and each of the nine districts had a Superintendent for this purpose with assistants who would make out the lists and see to the distribution. Those engaged in this work have felt that a system could be devised which would harmonize the work and have it operate according to uniform standards all over the city. After careful consideration and consultation with the officials of the *Star*, who were, of course, anxious to secure the highest possible efficiency, it has been decided to centralize this work at the Central Office and make this a part of the work of the Christmas Exchange. The District System will, therefore, beginning next Christmas, be discontinued and the work operated by the Christmas Exchange under the general supervision of a small Committee of the Central Council.

EGG AND MILK FUND

There are few starving children in Toronto but there are very many under-nourished children, not receiving food of the right kind, and who are consequently undersized and under weight. The fund was opened through the generosity of Mr. M. A. Cook, who, while not a citizen of Toronto, has extensive business interests here and who took a particular interest in seeing that under-nourished children should be given eggs and milk, which is the best possible food for them. We have worked

very closely in conjunction with the Nutrition Clinics operated under the Hospital for Sick Children in co-operation with the Department of Public Health and although the work has been in operation such a short time some really rather remarkable results have been attained, in gain in weight and health on the part of the children. It has been decided to make this a permanent fund.

PUBLICATIONS.

A much larger and more complete edition of the Social Service Directory was issued during the year, which was distributed among the Social Workers and Business Men of the Community and which filled a great need. There was a large demand for the Directory and it is to be hoped that those who have copies will make any necessary corrections as to officers, etc., as owing to the expensive publication, it will not be possible to publish an edition every year. The Annual Report and the Fresh Air and Influenza Reports were also published and distributed during the year.

INCORPORATION.

The Association has sought and obtained Incorporation under the laws of Ontario to carry on its work as a Philanthropic and Social Service Organization.

INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC.

The "Flu" appearing again last February made a call upon the Association for again organizing the necessary relief work for the distribution of liquid foods, bedding, etc. The epidemic did not receive as much public attention as in the previous year, but there were a tremendous number of cases, with a large death roll. Some conception of the great amount of work involved can be seen from the fact that when at its peak 647 individuals were being cared for daily.

Again the Association had the co-operation of a large number of organizations in carrying on this work, which was done with a minimum amount of friction and a maximum amount of efficiency.

LECTURE SERIES.

The Lecture Series this year was held under the auspices of the Department of Social Service of the University of Toronto and this co-operation between the Neighbourhood Workers' Association and Social Service Department was highly satisfactory to both. There were fifteen lectures, a paid up membership of 112, and the fees covered all expenses involved. The members followed the Lectures with keen interest and made it abundantly clear that they felt that this piece of social education was well worth while.

FEDERATION.

The Association records its obligations to the Federation for Community Service for the support given to its work during the year. The Neighbourhood Workers' Association has from the first believed firmly in the Federation idea and of the help that this could be to the individual organizations. During the past six months particularly the effectiveness of this method of social money raising has been amply demonstrated. The Federation has come through the experimental stage and is now established on a firm basis. The Neighbourhood Workers' Association will continue to co-operate in every possible way with the Federation in its plans.

CENTRAL COUNCIL.

The Central Council has met regularly with the exception of the February meeting which was cancelled owing to the epidemic. The amount of business pressing for consideration and action by the Central Council has increased to such an extent that some action will be necessary. Either the Council will have to increase the number of its meetings or else delegate the transaction of more of its business to the Executive. The Central Council now occupies a dual function. It is the governing body in regard to the definite work carried on by the Central Office. It is also the body which must, to a large extent, decide matters of general social policy in the city. I would recommend that the executive be increased in number and given fuller responsibility in regard to Central Office business, thus leaving more time in the Council for more general discussions of policy. The Secretary would like to express his keen appreciation of the work of the President. Mr. MacLean has not only been deeply interested in the work, but has given his time most faithfully and ungrudgingly, and the success of the year's work is due to this in no small measure. The executive have worked together most effectively on the various plans which have been put through during the year.

The Commission on Social Aims appointed by the Central Council decided to make a special feature of the problems of Illegitimacy and Desertion. During the year data has been gathered for a report dealing with each of these two problems and the urgency of these problems has been brought to the attention of the social workers and the public during the year. It is hoped that a Recreation Survey will also be made possible through the co-operation of the Toronto Playgrounds Association.

During the year some data was gathered in regard to the increase in rents which was embodied in a report printed in the press and used in a variety of other ways. The Housing Problem, at the present time, seems to be in a rather hopeless situation, however, and what is needed is not so much additional information as vigorous action.

SOCIAL CASE WORK.

During the year 1,137 new, 43 re-opened, 212 continued, and 16 out of town cases have been handled through the Central Office, making a total of 1,408 cases, involving 2,400 adults and 3,383 children. Last year there were 773 cases handled. This now makes a total of 1,910 listed in our files. Each month has shown a large increase over the work of the same month a year ago. During the month of April in 1920, 759 cases were active in the office. In the same month last year 307 cases were active in the office. The cases were handled with certain exceptions, largely by the regular N.W.A. system of referring the cases to the local organizations, the workers at the office, necessarily, in very many cases working in close co-operation. The large number of cases coming to us presents certain problems. As a clearing house for social work it is difficult to refuse cases, but we are much more anxious to raise the quality of the work than to increase its volume. Measures now being taken, outlined above, will, I believe result in a general betterment of standards.

DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONS.

While the work in the various districts naturally has its ups and downs, on the whole, the district work is in very much better shape than a year ago. All the local associations are organized and are meeting regularly. This year it was decided to open the work in the fall by a general meeting of the workers from all districts. This was very largely attended, in spite of the fact that it happened on a very rainy day, and the precedent thus established should be followed. There should be each year several meetings which would bring together the workers of all the districts. It is not merely a matter of spending a pleasant hour together, for these personal contacts undoubtedly result in increased efficiency in the work. The best co-operation is only possible between people who know each other.

NEW WORK.

The largest piece of work which opens up before us for the coming year is to develop work which is already under way. The ideal, as I take it, of the Association, is to do solid and enduring work and this means staying with a problem until real results are obtained. In several directions, particularly in regard to Illegitimacy and Desertion problems, we really have just begun our work and have paved the way for an important contribution to be made this next year, if we follow these problems up with sufficient tenacity and intelligence. In a number of other directions too the work for the coming year will be that of consolidating and developing plans already inaugurated. There is one new

piece of work, however, which I believe to be very necessary and which I hope to bring to the attention of the Executive at an early date, namely, the establishment of a Bureau of Legal Advice. The necessity for the securing of justice to the poor needs no emphasis, and I am convinced that there is a strong need for some place where social workers or their clients could bring cases involving legal difficulties without being faced with the necessity of paying legal fees. It is the experience in other cities that practically all the work of such a Bureau is accomplished without the necessity of taking the case into court.

There are some of the more obvious ways in which we have tried, or are planning to try to meet the social needs of Toronto. A great deal of the work at our Central Office is impossible to tabulate. It has been the ideal of the office, not merely to carry on specific pieces of work, but to help in every way possible the various affiliated organizations, each in their own special tasks. In a large number of cases the General Secretary and members of his Staff have been asked to give addresses and their advice sought in regard to problems relating to these organizations. Sometimes this advice appeared to be good and resulted in action, in a considerable number of cases, no result wherever was discernible. The intent and purpose remain the actuating ideal of our office.

In this report I have naturally not emphasized our failures, but while not dwelling on them publicly, the remembrance of them is very grievous unto us. With Browning we can only say, "What I aspired to be and was not, comforts me."

We have not graven it over our door-posts but we have tried to make, as the principle of our action and mental attitude, the motto inscribed on the Coat-of-Arms of the Prince of Wales, "I serve."

F. N. STAPLEFORD,

General Secretary.
